

BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

HISTORY OF

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IN THE WILD WEST

Has Been Scout, Circus Wagon Driver
Frontier Mail Carrier, Trapper, Hunter
and Free Lance Adventurer All of
His Eighty-odd Years

A Peaceful Ending to an Adventurous Career



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Life in the Wild West

Tied to a tree by Indians, and within an inch of being burned to death;

Captured by rebels, thrown into jail, and kept there for months;

Half way around the world with P. T. Barnum's circus as pony man and wagon driver;

War Scout in the Reil Rebellion, and afterwards attached to the service of Lord Strathcona;

Mail Carrier for the Hudson's Bay Company in the early days of Alberta;

Trapper, Hunter, Free-Lance Adventurer up and down the country for thirty years.

Between the Two Wars

On our return from St. Paul, where my partner and myself had sold a lot of furs, we traveled through the prairies of Dakota and it was always very foggy in the evening. We camped wherever night overtook up. One evening we camped within a few rods of a homesteader's shack without knowing it was there. Next morning we saw the shack and being hungry as anybody naturally would be, we went over to get a meal. When we arrived there a woman saw us coming, and thinking that we were bandits (we certainly did look rather tough in our buckskins and big revolvers) was afraid of us, but we assured her that no hurt would come to her and that we were hungry. She let us come in. She told us that all she had in the line of eatables was two pounds of corn flour, but that she had lots of fresh milk, as she had a couple of cows. She told us that her husband was dead for two years, and she had not had a crop of grain

since his death. She was compelled to mortgage her farm to a Jew in St. Paul, and that he was coming that same day at 10 o'clock to put her out or get the money which she did not have. My partner and myself listened very earnestly and as we were quite rich just at that time from the proceeds of our fur sale, we suggested to her that we help her out. We forced her to take the full amount of the mortgage as we had more money than we knew what to do with, and told her to be sure that this Jew gave her a receipt in full, as we did not want the Jew to come back at her for the money again.

About a month later we came to the new railroad, which was the C.P.R., and we were like young boys who want to investigate new things. We waited until a gravel train came along and asked the men for a ride, and they said the next time they would give us one. The engineer would not stop the train, so we made him, by shooting very near to him. We would not hurt them for anything; and he stopped. We made the whole crew get into one car and we tried to run the works, succeeding for only a short time, as we could not stop the engine. We went and told the engineer to come back, which he did very readi-

ly, as he was very much afraid of us, thinking that we were real, live bandits. We made him take us back to where we had left our horses, telling him never to refuse us a free ride again, which he promised very readily, seeming to be very much pleased at the thought of our departure.

From there we continued horseback to the Rockies and we stopped at General Strange's Ranch, where he hired us as cowboys, and we worked for him several months.

I want to tell you about my experience as bar-tender in a Western Saloon.

The country was full of cowboys and they delighted in hanging around saloons for days at a time. They bought lots of liquor, and I made hundreds of dollars every day, Sunday included, while the bullets were flying around my head. One day I had a very close call, as one fellow tried to steal a bottle off the table. I struck him with the butt of my revolver and immediately some of his friends got me, and were going to tie me up to "sling me," but there were more boys on my side, and they got me free. We spent that night in drinking on the house.

Another time I was going through the Saskatoon prairies looking for a new pony, as the one I was using was getting worn out, as I had used him for two years' traveling, and there were lots of wild ponies at that time, so I was just taking a look around. I located a large bunch across the Saskatchewan river. I went down and got off my horse, and leading him, swam over. When I landed I found my clothes were yellow with gold, and gold had clung between my fingers. I promptly took off my hat and holding it in the water to see how much sand was drifting, and in a few minutes my hat was full. I proceeded to the bunch of ponies, and landing one I had picked out, went back and told my chums about the gold, but they said there was more money in furs then, and we could look up the gold later. There is where we made our mistake, as soon people began to come into the country, and many made fortunes where I swam the river and all along it.

I have in mind something that every boy between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four should read, and consider much.

It happened one time when I was out along with my partner driving a herd of cattle to one of the forts.

Capture of Télesphore Alexander Blais 1869, Red River Valley — Riel Rebellion



G. DUMONT

Télesphore Alexander BLAIS

L. RIEL

I knew a storm was coming, but not nearly as well as did the cattle and our horses. It started to snow one evening, and we drove the cattle into a big timber, and we went on a mile or two and picketed our ponies. By that time it was snowing and blowing in good shape and we didn't have time to hunt anything to eat. All we had was one rabbit and we rolled up in our blankets and laid down in the snow. Very soon I was covered up and every once in a while had to get up as the snow began to get heavy and come closer to the surface. It stormed for three whole days and there must have been nearly three feet of snow on the level ground. It finally ceased and my hunger increased as my one rabbit had lasted only one day and a half, then I didn't eat as much as I ordinarily did. I got up and if ever I wished I had never left home, it was then, as we did not even have salt on our meat and no bread. I shot a couple of partridges and cooked them, filling up once more. It makes me feel so sorry for young boys who leave home not knowing what they are going into, that I wish I could talk to every young boy who is discouraged with home life and tell him just a few little things that would probably change his mind.

I had been caught in lots and lots of storms, but none quite as mad as this one. Towards evening of the fourth day a warm chinook wind blew up and before morning everything was slush and muck. We stayed there for a couple of days until our horses could get fed up again, and I want to tell you that I got fed up also, as we killed a young calf and cut off the steak, and my partner and myself danced the pow-wow while it cooked, we were so glad the storm was over. After a grand meal on this, we felt like new men and so did our horses also felt good.

Another incident that happened while on this same drive. We had to drive the cattle over a river and had an awful time getting them started. We kept urging them on and on, and the hind ones were horning the ones in front, and they had to start down, and I didn't watch myself close enough, and the first thing I knew some of them were right behind me, and crowding on because of the force behind. My pony and myself were taken down into the mass of cattle and floating ice, as it was just the breaking up of winter, and I want to say if I never was scared before I was then. My partner seeing what had hap-

pened, came just as far as he could, and threw his lasso to me, and I made it fast to my saddle, and kept dodging the cattle and ice. The cattle when in water keep pawing with their front feet and it was just a streak of luck on my pony's and my own part that we didn't get trampled under. I was in there for a couple of hourse, and as it was spring and ice still in the water, you may be sure I wasn't very warm when I came out with my clothes ringing wet and nearly frozen. However, I made it and we built a fire and I dried my clothes and warmed myself, wondering still how I had managed to get away from such a narrowly escaped death.

I would like to tell a few incidents that occurred while I was scout under General Strange. When the company with which I was attached arrived near Fort Pitt, I was ahead with a few others taking care of the men who were making roads over muskegs, making it passable for the cannons. And as we came in sight of Fort Pitt we noticed a very pitiful sight. The Fort was burned down and also the church and schoolroom. We at once noticed that our enemy, Big Bear, had been there before us and had left nothing but ashes. I being thirsty, went to a well nearby

and as I drew closer, I smelt a very bad odor, and it got worse as I got nearer to the well. I went over and looked in. It was very dark, but I could see two white spots, so I called one of the men over and told him to get some paper and light it so we could see, and there were two Sisters who had been teaching Indian children, and they were scalped and thrown in the well, as it was dry. We waited until the army caught up and then the General gave orders to have the Sisters taken out and buried. We investigated further and found that Big Bear had taken everything out of the storeroom, including all bacon, flour, etc., which was very valuable and necessary to the soldiers. As we were leaving there we saw some ashes, but all we could see was the bare skeleton stretched out, burned. It appeared they had tied this man down to some logs on the ground and piled brush over him, setting fire to it. I called Dr. Pierre of the 65th Battalion, and when he came he touched the body with his foot and it crumbled into ashes. We learned later on that he was one of the captains of Fort Pitt. We also learned that Captain Delaney's wife and daughter and servant girl were taken prisoners, and they had killed Captain Delaney.

When we had just resumed march, I was out scouting when word reached me that General Strange wanted me at once. I promptly reported to his camp some miles distant and reached there as dusk. He wanted me to go and watch Chief Poundmaker and Big Bear, as they were gathering braves from the Cree and Blackfoot tribes to strike at Battleford. He also told me to watch for any signs of Mrs. Captain Delaney, her daughter and half-breed servant girl. (I never found any trace of her, but others did later on and got her and her daughter safely back to our men, who sent her back to her former home in Toronto). I got supper and fed my horse and started at once for these marauders' trail the same night. I went straight to what we then called Duck Lake, as I was pretty sure I would find some good news of their whereabouts around there. I reached there just before daybreak, and I noticed Indians in the water hiding from my view, and every once in a while they would look out to see if any of our men were coming that way. They never noticed me, as I was very careful and knew how to stay under cover, having been in former wars with Indians. I started back to General Strange and reported during the day, telling him what I

had seen. He wanted to know how many there were, but I did not know exactly, having seen only a few Indian scouts. General Strange then told me to go back and watch them until troops arrived, then we would see how many there were. I went back and waited and very soon the troops arrived. To my great surprise we found there were over four hundred Indians hiding in the lake. The Indians hide in water with face just out so as to breathe, and had I not noticed a couple of heads sticking out, they would have closed us up in the rear; therefore we might have lost heavily. They were waiting until our men passed; then they would have come upon us from behind. They were caught in time, however, and were taken prisoners and sent to Regina. A few troops were to remain there until the war was over. We camped there that night and again I was called to General Strange's tent. (He used a tent just like the soldiers and he moved when they did). When I got there, my orders were to go and see where and what the Indians were up to and also see how the roads were through a muskeg, as General Strange knew all this country like a book, and was afraid of muskeg. I went and found the Indians making rifle pits, as



GENERAL STRANGE SCOUT BRIGADE

their scouts were busy also and knew where we were headed for and that our trail came along side of the worst muskey and through bush. These rifle pits held from one to three Indians. I saw them digging those holes and reported the news. General Strange lined the infantry up in front, just rifle shot distance from the Indians, and he had the men handling the Gatling gun come around and get in line with these holes while the troops kept the Indians busy in front. Then the fun started. General Strange was the wisest and best man I had ever worked under. He ordered his men who handled the Gatling gun to clean out these rifle pits. It was only a very short time until this task was accomplished, and we kept on our march without any further trouble from Poundmaker's braves, for it was they who tried to fight us at this point.

Poundmaker got away with some of his men and joined Big Bear, and made towards Beaver River to tackle General Middleton's men. We followed and it took very near by a week. We marched twenty miles a day; fed on hard-tack. The 65th men were getting worn and ragged, but kept up their spirit. When we arrived there was nothing to be seen of them. We then went on to Prince Albert.

One day near Fish Creek I had quite an experience along with other scouts. I was quite a way ahead of General Middleton and his men when we came across the Indians. The troops were just a short distance behind. When they heard the shots they at once came to help and the enemy wheeled and ran their horses into a very heavily wooded ravine, and then they came up just as near the top of the bank as possible and began to shoot at us. I remember very well when one brave got extraordinarily bold and got right up and did a war dance. This dance ended very soon, however, as a well directed bullet put him on his way to the happy hunting grounds. The enemy had left their horses running loose and we caught several of them, and others that they had tied up in the ravine we shot at and killed several, which caused the enemy great loss, as they loved their horses just as much, and more, than they loved themselves. This made them down-hearted and very soon they fell back. We camped there that night and knew very well the enemy was not far away. We were good and hungry and we dared not shoot as the enemy would worry us all night. We had a very strong picket duty and when a soldier has fought all day long and has to do

night duty when he is hungry, it is no joke, but they did it with the best of courage and never faltered.

I remember well the next day when we had a very sad duty to perform. The men that had faced death and met it without flinching the day before we wrapped in blankets and placed on stretchers and mournfully they were followed by the troops to their last resting place. The troops hauled a lot of stones and put them into a solid shape and placed a large wooden cross in favor of some of the West's bravest men.

One night we were all awakened by the firing of a rifle, and the sentry said three horsemen had been seen advancing and did not answer to his challenge. The troops stayed up in readiness for a while and as nothing came of the disturbance, we went back to bed again. The next morning revealed everything. A strange man had come into camp and as he was a transport officer and had gone on the wrong trail and was out in search of the road or of a camp the night before, and fearing that we were enemy forces, had not answered the challenge, but had laid quite still on the ground nearby all night. We at once

went out and escorted him and his transports, consisting of about forty wagons of supplies for Humboldt, and we were sure glad when we got them to camp and had a square meal again.

THE ATTACK ON BATOCHE

Three places were in immediate danger: Prince Albert, Battleford, and Fort Pitt, where they shot Captain Delaney before we got there. Three relief expeditions were provided for in the plan of campaign. General Middleton was to advance from Qu'Appelle to Batoche, Riel's headquarters; Colonel Otter from Swift Current to Battleford, and General Strange from Calgary to Edmonton, Telesphore Alexander Blais, his old scout, with his to Edmonton. On the 6th of April General Middleton's detachment left Fort Qu'Appelle and twelve days later reached Clark's Crossing on the Saskatchewan where it had been arranged to meet the steamer Northcote, which was coming down the river laden with supplies and reinforcements. Although the steamer had not yet arrived, General Middleton divided his force, one-half on either bank, and advanced in the direction of Batoche. A few days

later, as the division on the east bank was entering the ravine of Fish Creek, it came suddenly upon a strong force of rebels. The ground before the village was found to be honeyvombed with rifle pits. Three days of skirmishing before these entrenchments wore out the patience of the volunteers, so that on the fourth day General Middleton had great difficulty in holding them. Riel gave himself up. Without loss of time General Middleton pressed on to Prince Albert, and thence to Battleford. Ten days later after leaving Swift Current, Colonel Otter halted within three miles of Battleford. Fearing that Poundmaker, although as yet not actively hostile, might be influenced to join forces with Big Bear, he decided to move in the direction of the neighboring reserve. The Indian encampment was found to occupy the higher of two hills beyond the ravine of Cut Knife Creek. The appearance of the volunteers upon the Crest of the first hill was the signal for battle. Early in the engagement the two guns Colonel Otter had brought with him broke down. This disaster coupled with the superiority of the Indians in number, made it necessary to fall back in the direction of Battleford. The loss sustained in this fight was eight killed and four-

teen wounded, and might have been much more serious had Poundmaker followed up his advantage by pursuing his retiring enemy.

Meanwhile General Strange had relieved Edmonton from danger of an Indian attack and was descending the North Saskatchewan in order to hem in Big Bear between his force and that of Colonel Otter stationed at Battleford. On the 24th of May, Fort Pitt was reached. Three days later Big Bear's band was located, but was found to be too strongly entrenched to be successfully attacked. When alarmed at the strength of the forces closing in upon them, the Indians began to retreat. Major Steele was sent in pursuit. It was a long chase over hundreds of miles of broken country. Gradually Big Bear's force was broken up and the leader himself finally surrendered to the Mounted Police. Meanwhile at Battleford, Poundmaker and his followers had come in and laid down their arms. With Riel, Poundmaker and Big Bear in custody, the rebellion was at an end, and it only remained to punish the rebel leaders, who had defied the authority of the Canadian government. Riel was tried at Regina, and though ably defended, was found guilty of treason and sentenced to be hanged.

Eight Indians also paid the death penalty for murder, while others were imprisoned; among the latter, Poundmaker, who died in prison. Although a trying experience while it lasted, the Saskatchewan Rebellion was not without its good results. The Dominion government was brought to recognize the claims of the Metis and did so by promptly issuing title-deeds for their lands. In recognition of their growing importance, the North-West Territories were granted representation in the Senate and the House of Commons. To preserve order and to protect the lives of the settlers scattered throughout the country, the Mounted Police force was considerably increased, but the greatest influence of the Rebellion was not upon the North-West alone, but upon the whole Dominion. Eagerly the volunteers went—

“Over dim forest and lake,
over lone prairie and brake,
The clamor of battle to wake
* for kindred and country’s sake,
Into the North and the Westland.”

AN ADVENTURE WITH WILD HORSES

Our ponies did not last long while doing duty in the Riel Rebellion and the government needed new horses for the cavalry. My partner and myself knowing where to locate a large bunch and as we knew something of their pranks when caught, we were given a contract to get some. We had caught a few before for ourselves and as our ponies were fast we would lie low when we came close to a bunch and wait for them to come closer and then away right among them and pick out a good one, throw the rope on to it, slow up gently and wait for some fun, which is always waiting for you when you catch a wild horse. Often the bunch will make at you, and you have to fight to save both your horse's and your own life. I remember well the days I had to fight with them for my life. The way we did it was to take a big club or use your tomahawk, striking them on the head. If that didn't stop them, bullets always did. When you get a wild horse and get him broke they seem to be tireless. I have ridden them hard all day long, week in and week out and never seem to play them out. The only big trouble is breaking them, even if they were only little

fellows. None of them being anything other than wild Indian cayuses, which would not weigh more than seven to nine hundred pounds. There were all colors of them. Say, it was just a lovely sight to watch a large bunch running. It just seems that I can see them yet. White ones, my they were pretty, and the pure cream ones with long flowing manes and tails. A most lovely sight.

JOHN L. SULLIVAN'S TRIP TO THE WEST

One time while in Dakota, John L. Sullivan, then a famous boxer, came out West to see what it was like, and to learn how to ride a horse.

He was getting along fine with us cowboys, when one evening he was sparring a little with one and he touched him a little hard, knocking the cowboy down, which would be enough to make anybody sore. This cowboy did get mad and pulled out his gun, telling Mr. Sullivan that he had better leave his gloves locked up, as it was not very safe for any man to hit another while fighting if he valued his life any. Mr. Sullivan did put his gloves away, promising not to bring them out until his departure.

Another day Mr. Sullivan asked for a pony to ride. We asked him what kind he wanted, and he said a real bronco. We told him it would be better for him to take a quiet one, but he said no. We got the real bronco and Mr. Sullivan got on him, staying only a few minutes, however, as the pony didn't like him very well, and left him sitting on the ground with all his conceit gone. He was a very good fellow from that on.

While driving a stage for a hunting party I had a very bad accident. There were thirteen of us in the stage coach and we had a fine time. I was teamster, driving four horses, one team ahead of the other.

We were coming along very peaceably when a flock of ducks were flying over. One of the party shot into the flock, scaring my lead team, and they started to run. Of course, it was only natural for the others to follow and they seemed to be trying to get ahead. I pulled and tugged on the lines and broke the check-line on the leaders. I saw it was no use trying to stop them, and I tried to keep them going straight until they played themselves out. However, as it always does occur, one horse is faster than another, and they kept edging over off the road. We were coming

close to a bridge over a deep narrow gully and I saw they were not going to get on the bridge. Also that we were all in danger of our lives, as there would be nothing to stop us from going over the bank, which would have resulted in death for us. I asked one of the party to shoot one horse, but they all seemed afraid. I saw something had to be done and done quick, so I pulled out my revolver and pulled on the leader's head until it turned sideways to me, when I shot him through the ear. This piled the whole bunch into a heap. I was thrown under the coach and the front axle hit my shoulder and broke it. I tried to get out as I was caught, and in so doing the hind wheel ran over my arm below the shoulder. I lost consciousness. The men helped as best they could. A couple of them walked quite a few miles until they found a telephone and got a doctor. (I forgot to say that none of the others were hurt, only for the shock of the sudden stop). I was taken to the hospital, where I spent seventeen months. I had to go under a second operation as the first doctor didn't fix my shoulder right and from that I have only the use of my one arm, and hand, as the other one I can lift not higher than even the elbow.

The hospital bill very nearly broke me and not having the use of my arm, I could not work. I had a little money left, which I soon spent on liquor and I soon lost all interest in life.

I might say here that on account of this accident, I have found a few friends who are helping me to make this book plain, as I can neither read nor write, and this book is all that I have to keep me in my last years.

At my home near Montreal there used to be big floods when the St. Lawrence would jam up with ice and then everything near the river suffered from the water and often it carried away stock, buildings and anything movable. During one of these floods my mother had gone to the shore in a large boat with several others, and I thought she was gone quite a while. I was only twelve at the time and had a little sister of nine. We got our bark canoe and started to go to her. I was considered a good hand with a canoe, even when I was only that age, and I suppose I knew it at that time. At any rate, we started and the current and wind were too much for me, and away we went down stream, both my sister and myself crying. A large boat saw and came to our rescue

or I would not have been here today. I do not see why I was spared so often when death seemed so certain.

When we got back our home was washed away and we had to stay in the school house, which was awfully strange to us.

We were all standing at the school door, a gang of us boys. We wanted some red-eyed whisky, so we decided to go to the docks, where all the toughs stayed, and where we were accustomed to getting whisky from the sailors. We thought we would hunt some rags, bones or old bottles, etc., to get some money. But rags, bones or bottles were scarce that day. Suddenly we got a brilliant idea. One of the gang was a small lad, and we decided to put him in a sack and sell him to the half-blind bone trader. We stuck him in the sack and marched him off to the buyer. "Hello, Mr. River, want to buy some bones?" we yelled. "Yes; put them on the scales here and let's see how much they weigh." We put the bag on the scales. It came to about forty-five or fifty pounds. Now the next thing was to get our money and get the boy out of the sack without River finding out. He gave us our money, and we rather obligingly asked him where we should put the bones. He told

us to throw them on the pile at the rear end of the shed. We hurriedly carried the bag around there, got the boy out of the sack and marched off to the whisky peddler to get our bottle of booze. We then went off to the lumber yard, where we proceeded to empty the bottle of its contents.

The teacher gave us the name of Black Horse Gang, because of our toughness and evil ways.

THAT is the story in tabloid of one of the most remarkable individuals in Edmonton. To have gone through such varied stages of a more than unusual adventurous career would seem to be history enough; but added to it all is the fact that this man does not know whether he has any kith or kin in the world, cannot tell you how old he is, and does not even pass by the name that rightfully belongs to him. Alexander Telesphore Blais is the style in which he began life, but some one who wished to Anglicize him changed Blais to Blair, and by that latter name he is known today. Sometimes they call his just "Dad," by virtue of his years. As nearly as can be figured out, he is eighty-three years old, but he says himself that he feels only about eighty. As to his



“DADY” BLAIS AS A COWBOY

family connections, he has long since lost all track of them, and whether any of them are alive or not, he is actually alone in the world. In his spry old age he is serving as caretaker of the C.N.R. passenger station, which never was better kept than under his watchful eye and faithful broom. It is a far cry from the life he used to lead on the wide prairie, but he is happy about it, and by way of compensation he has a headful of the liveliest recollections that one would wish to hear. Herewith is his own story.

AT HOME

I was born on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, about fifty miles from Montreal, where the river runs swift and the trees are peacefully standing on both sides of the river, with the beautiful farm country spreading out for miles before one's eye. Father and Mother were blessed with sixteen children, six boys and ten girls. I was but a young boy when I showed signs of an adventurous spirit, which, of course, was quite in keeping with the French-Canadian blood flowing through my veins. One of my first sports was swimming and in the water I seemed to be at home, and

in the bay below our farm I would spend many a long summer day splashing around in the water with such delight that very frequently I forgot to go home and attend to the domestic duties assigned to me. On such occasions when I would return home with my clothing very wet a good sound thrashing and a swift kick was all I would get for supper, but this did not stop me from having a little fun in the river. You know we used to swim across the river for a drink of whisky, and the way we used to do it was like this: About ten of us would get together and buy a bottle of whisky, only a few cents then for a big bottle. Then we would send the whisky and our clothing over in a small boat to the other side and when the boat had reached the other side we would line up alongside of another and count, one, two, three, go. Splash we would go. Talk about swimming; my goodness, we would swim—and at times fight in the water. The first one over would take a drink, then the second and third, but no more, the rest receiving none because it was not far enough to the bottom of the bottle. I did not lose my drink very often though, as I used to keep fairly good time crossing that river. I also had hard times, too, as they sent me to school to learn

to read and write and I got along fine for about two months, learned nearly the whole alphabet, mind you, but the teacher was a cranky rabbit, and one day (I not liking him too well either) he came to give me a licking, so I got mad and caring for nothing, you know, he getting the best of me, so I bit him. He had to let his hold go, but after that he threw me out and that was the last of my schooling, although I learned to read a little after that. I had some experience in hunting, too, but the bullets cost money those days, so I had to be careful and not waste any. My Father always figured one bullet to each duck when we were duck hunting, and if we missed our duck he did not miss giving us boys a licking. I remember how I went out one day and came home with no bullet and no duck and had to take my medicine, too. Next day I managed to get out again with my rifle loaded and being mad at my father for licking me and mad at myself for missing the duck I started out. Along the river bank I crawled for a long time but it seemed the ducks were all informed about my presence, as they swam way out on the river, and I knew that the time was short if I wished to get home and have the duck cooked in time for my father, as

father wanted his meals on time. I spotted a great big fat duck, it was far out. I looked at the duck, then at the sun and then at the distance, and then I thought of the licking I had got before, but I had to do something, so I said, here goes. I loaded my rifle, took good aim and, bang. The duck had lost its head. I had been thinking so much of the other difficulties that I had forgotten the river was running very swift at this place and I had no dog those days to bring my ducks in when hunting. I had to have that duck or another licking, so I said to myself, try it. I took some of my clothes off and in I went. I swam real hard, too, but the duck was out where the current was swiftest and it seemed to me it was going down as fast as I as, but I got my duck. Being very tired and very far from the shore I took the duck by the mouth, as I could not spare a hand then and instead of going against the current I went with it, kind of sideways, you know. But, Mister; I was tired when I got ashore. After getting my clothes and rifle I ran all the ay home. I was feeling pretty rich when I got home on time with my duck and after father had eaten it, he felt fine and he came out to me and sat down on a big log with the rifle and showed

me how to hold it. Oh Mister; he was a good shot, never missed his mark, and that is how I learned to handle a rifle.

Then about twelve or thirteen years old, I had a chum and we used to be together a great deal. One day my chum came to me and told me of a horse race in a village across the river, saying, "If you are going across the river with me to see the race I shall try and steal fifty cents from my father. It will cost us twenty-five cents apiece to get in, you know." I said all right, I'll go with you. He got the fifty cents, then we took a small boat across the river, as we were both good on the river, and instead of walking we went up stream and crossed opposite the village where the horse race was to be held, we left our boat and started for the race. We had an exciting time, and when it was over we went with some of the horsemen and they gave us plenty to drink until we were quite intoxicated. Then we decided to start for home. We got to our boat and found that there was a ferry going across. My chum said, "We will tie up to that big ring in the back of the ferry and it will take us across without any work at all and we can go down stream on the other side." I agreed and took the rope through the big ring and

held on to the other end of the rope. When the ferry got going the current from under the ferry and from the side of it filled our boat. As it was getting quite dark and by partner not being able to swim very well, I let go the rope to help us, but our boat turned upside-down and we were washed out. I tried to get to my chum with an oar but the current drew him under and I did not see him any more. I then started for the shore. It took me a long time as the current was swiftly carrying me downward and until finally I came close to a lumber skiff, my strength was about gone, as I had my clothes on, and I could not let my clothes go, as I would have gotten a licking. I made for the skiff and hollered to them to let me have a line, which they did. I was safe, but I was sorry for my chum, as he was one of my very best friends. It was under such events as these that gave me such extraordinary physical strength, power of endurance and keenness that saw me through my eighty or eighty-three odd years.

LEAVING HOME

A warm day, early in the summer, when the news had reached us that the Barnum Cir-



“DADY” BLAIR AT EIGHTY-THREE

cus was to be showing in Montreal in a few days, there was considerable talk about the wild animals that would be there and the way they were trained to perform; the tales told us by the older people stirred my blood and caused me to feel that home life was becoming too tame for me. We were told of the fierceness of the lions, strength of the bear and the power of the snake, until everyone with bated breath and glaring eyes could in their fancy see these terrible animals performing their wildest acts of savagery. The elephant would seem like a great building walking, while the lion would tear any living thing in front of it to pieces, and the bear would strike an ox with his front paw until the ox's head would be but a mangled mess, then he would pick up the ox with that same paw and throw it on his back as if it had been a ball of twine, and carry it to a safe place where it would only serve as a meagre meal. On the other hand the snake would coil itself around its prey and crush every bone like matchwood, after which it would be devoured in one swallow. These tales were bound to stir my blood, although a silent listener, except for a few questions. It was a new world to me, and parental rule, severe at times, and home life

and the things connected with it, held very little. Even the river with its many fascinations seemed to fade away compared with the great beyond with the wild and savage beasts that I had heard about that day.. I at once became conscious that my home was now too small for me and that there was hardly enough room for me to breath. As I went about my chores as was my daily lot to do, it all seemed contemptible and I wished to get rid of it as soon as possible, but too well I knew that my parents under no conditions would give me permission to leave, even to see the circus that was coming so soon to Montreal. A great battle was now going on in my mind. On the one side stood my friends, home comforts, the swimming contests which had occupied such a large place in my mind, and besides, I had come to be recognized as one of the strongest swimmers in our district. Also a number of other things that had become dear to me in my childhood and boyhood days came to my troubled heart. On the other hand stood the great wide world. It seemed to offer so much, and the more I thought of it the bigger it seemed to look, until I felt that I had to settle with myself just what course to follow. It was a bit dusky, the chores were all done, so

I walked to my favorite spot on the river bank, where I could not only see the river but also a great deal of the surrounding country. Here I sat down to think it over, the All Important Question. My eyes rested on the river, then the surroundings; I had seen it all so often. I remembered the time when I had first swam across the river, what a long stretch it seemed to be, but tonight it seemed different. I had conquered the river, I could do as I pleased on it and it looked so small. The surrounding country seemed to have undergone a similar change. There was nothing really attractive about it any longer: it looked so common; there was something else in my mind that seemed to gain the mastery of my thoughts, "The Great Beyond." I sat there a long time, until the stars were beginning to smile down and seemed to be saying, "Come with us and we will show you a new world." I then arose with jaw set and clinched fists. My mind was made up. It was, I shall go tomorrow. At last I took one long look at the river and surrounding country which was almost hidden in darkness, then I started homeward with determined strides, feeling that I had settled a very important question and homeward bound I laid my plans for my departure. After secur-

ing some provisions for the trail to Montreal I went upstairs to the loft in the log cabin and crawled in between two of my brothers to rest. Everything was quiet, and I soon fell asleep with the determination to awaken early in the morning. The next morning when the light began to break in the east, I was busy putting on my clothes. After dressing I picked up the parcel with my provisions and climbed down the ladder from the loft without making a sound that would awaken my brothers or any other members of the family. Quietly opening the door and closing it again I stood outside. My heart felt lighter, but I knew quite well that I was not out of the danger zone yet. Our dog came up to me with a look of surprise and satisfaction, unusual for him to see me up at this hour of the morning, and of course he offered his company and friendship, but I did not accept it as the dog had to stay at home while I started off with all speed. A few hours later I sat down by the side of a cool spring sheltered by the same brush from the travelers on the road, and then ate my breakfast. Now I felt safe and free, knowing the world was ahead of me, which I must see, know and master.

WITH THE CIRCUS

After arriving in Montreal the question was to locate the circus. After some walking and a few inquiries, the famous Barnum Circus was found. After meeting several discouragements on the road, the question had presented itself, "Had I not better turn back home again?" However, I felt well repaid and quite satisfied with my choice, when with open eyes and mouth I beheld the animals performing, even though I had to confess to myself that the elephant was not near as big as I thought it would be, and the other animals in like proportion fell below the fixed standard in my own mind, in regard to size and strength, but when it came to the performances, they were certainly far beyond anything that I had dreamed of. To watch the seals play ball, the tigers leaping through a large ring hanging high in the air and the other animals in their different spheres, performing their almost miraculous feats, surpassed all expectations and filled me with thrills, until I found myself standing upright on my seat waving my hat in sheer admiration. But I was soon brought back to quite normal feelings, when from behind arose a storm of

“Get down! Get down!” with earnest assurances that if I did not get down they would soon do so with violence, also dispatch me outside with more haste than when I entered. After the various assurances I sat down and quietly looked on until the performance was over. There was only one thing about this circus business I did not approve of; it cost too much money.

I had only a few dollars when I left home and by the time all the side shows were visited I found myself, not quite broke but badly cracked, and decided to slip under the canvas in order to save enough money for my breakfast. Following my decision I crawled into one of the tents where some ponies were sheltered, and here I fell asleep on some empty bags, but it was not long until I was awakened by rather powerful and vigorous shaking. Opening my eyes in bewilderment I beheld a middle-aged man with a stern face who asked, “Who are you?” The man looked rather amused for a moment, but assuming his old sternness, he asked, “What are you doing here?” Upon the question I fully explained how I had spent all my money on the show, and in order to save enough for breakfast I had decided to seek a shelter here. The man

again looked me over and with a grin of satisfaction, he said, "I believe you are good stuff, though you are not very big. How old are you, and what is your name?" "I am fourteen, sir," I said. "My name is Telesphoore Alexander Blais, but they call me Aex." "Do you want work?" he asked. "Sure thing, I want work," I answered, as I was almost breathless with the prospect of going with the circus. "You are not very old but you will do for tending my ponies," said the strange man, "and besides you will have a chance to see the world. Your work will be to keep my ponies clean and feed and water them properly, as the man I have for this work is not reliable. He drinks too much for that, and it is too important to be neglected." Almost beyond control for sheer joy, I solemnly promised to do his work faithfully. A few more words were exchanged in regard to wages and the final instructions were given, after which Barnum—for he it was—departed and left me to determine whether I had seen a vision or had a wonderful dream, or if it might be reality; but the answer came back; it is real, it is real, and I am off with the circus. My experiences with the circus were not always of the best kind, and the details of them are not very

clear in my mind with the exception of one or two instances which I shall mention. On one occasion while traveling through the States the man who had been attending the ponies tried to murder me, because of envy. Shortly after we left Montreal I found a dog that I liked quite well, so I started to feed him. We soon became very good friends. He used to follow me every step I made. I shared my meals with him, played with him when I had time and he would always sleep by my side. I had no bed, you see, and slept on the ponies' tent bags and hay or whatever was handy to make a bed of. One day after driving a great deal of the time and pitching out tents and showing at night I was dead tired, and when the camp was quiet I soon made my bed in the ponies' tent and threw myself on it with the dog beside me and I was soon sound asleep. By this time the fellow that had been attending the ponies found his work quite disagreeable, as he was driving a ticket wagon, and he tried in many ways to get back his old job, but Barnum would not have him back on it because I was doing my work all right. Besides, he was a big man and I was only a young boy and Barnum liked me well, so I was safe enough on my job. Anyway, that

night I was awakened by my dog, who stuck his cold nose down on my face. I opened my eyes (it was a summer night and not very dark) and noticed a big man with something which he was holding in both hands. Although it was too dark for me to distinguish what it was, I at once recognized the figure of the man as the one that had tended the ponies before and knew very well that he had not come in there for any good that time of the night. I watched him close. He came quietly and slowly toward me from the entrance of the tent. I was by this time wide awake but did not think it was wise to move just yet as my dog was keeping fairly quiet, except for a soft murr now and then. However, I held myself ready to jump out of the way as soon as he would make any suspicious move. When he was about six or eight feet away from me, he lifted the thing in his hands and made a spring toward me. As soon as he did that I jumped to one side, at the same time something heavy dropped on my head. The first thing I grabbed for was the fork which was standing right beside me, but there was another foe more dangerous to the man than myself and the fork: it was my dog. As soon as I had left my bed and grabbed the fork and the man had thrown

his stone—for that is what it was—the dog made a mad rush at the man but was kicked back. The man then ran for all he was worth to the opening of the tent, the dog hotly pursuing him. I hurried over to the tent door, but was just in time to see the man disappear behind another tent. Being afraid he might kill my dog I called him back. My dog, faithful friend, had saved my life. We went back to bed again, but not to sleep, keeping watch together for the rest of the night. The next day I reported the event to Barnum and the man was promptly discharged. However, I lost no time in buying a revolver, so I could defend myself in such cases. Another time while I was driving a ticket wagon I had a narrow escape from getting into trouble. It was the custom of the circus men to get the younger boys to steal for them and one night, or early in the morning when driving from one town to another we passed an orange orchard. The men asked me to go and get some oranges for them. At first I was not willing to do so, but finally consented to go. I left my wagon on the road and climbed the orchard fence not very far from the house. When I had gathered all that I could safely carry, a voice from behind commanded me quite boisterously

"Drop those oranges." I was startled at first. Looking around I discovered that the man was pointing a revolver at me. Knowing quite well that if I dropped the oranges I would never hear the last of it from the men with the circus, and having left my right hand free in order to climb the fence I hurriedly reached to my hip pocket and pulled out my revolver and pointed it right at the man's head. This was done so quickly that the man was taken unawares, he never suspecting me of carrying firearms. We stared each other in the face, the man again repeating, "Drop those oranges," followed by a threatening to shoot me dead if I did not do so. To this I answered, "I can shoot as fast as you can." By this time the circus men were shouting to me to hang on to the oranges and let daylight through the man, fill him full of lead, and other enthusiastic suggestions. The man, awakening to the seriousness of the situation turned and walked away toward the house, and realizing his life was in just as much danger as mine, hesitatingly said, "All right," I also made my escape in all haste over the fence, jumped on my wagon and drove off. I divided the oranges and gave the event little thought after that. We proceeded to the next

town, where the tents were pitched and things went on as usual until on in the evening when one of the drivers came into the ponies' tent, where I was busily engaged in my work, and told me to go over to Barnum's tent. Thinking it might be some new instructions, I hurried over. On entering the tent behold there was the man whom I had a dispute with over the ownership of the oranges that I had stolen from his orchard, and standing beside Barnum I discovered a policeman. The policeman then asked the man if I was the boy guilty of the crime, the man affirming that I was the boy. The policeman then asked me if I had gone into the man's orchard and helped myself to some oranges and afterwards threatened to shoot the man. I admitted that I had helped myself to the man's oranges but that the man had threatened to shoot me first. An examination or investigation then followed, in which I told how I was asked by the other drivers to do the stealing and not wishing to be classed as a coward I agreed to do the stealing of the oranges and to keep further fun from being made of me I insisted on keeping the oranges after they were in my possession. After a full explanation, the man agreed to let the matter drop if he received pay for his

fruit and trouble in coming to town. This Barnum readily agreed to do and I escaped the hand of the law with a promise that I would never do it again.

I was with Barnum for four years, two years tending ponies and two years driving a ticket wagon. I was all through the States, South America, England, France and Germany. It was hard work and a rough life. They made me drink and poured whiskey down my throat till I got to like it. Barnum wouldn't give me money enough to come back to Canada, but when we got through with the tour he paid us off, and gave me a suit of clothes. I had four hundred dollars then and felt pretty rich.

In 1852, according to my own reckoning, I left Montreal with a chum and walked to Ottawa. A box car ride on the railroad broke my journey a little from Ottawa to Mattawa, and from Wattawa I walked to Fort Garry, the Winnipeg of today. The trip was not made at one stretch, however, but took two years, and on the way we stopped here and there, and fished and hunted with the Indians. When finally we reached Fort Garry, a strapping youth of twenty years, I was ready to begin the career of western life that has since

lengthened out to more than three score years. My first work was with a Hudson's Bay foreman, and in one capacity or another I filled in the next dozen years till the Red River rebellion broke out.

One of the incidents which followed in the course of the next few years was that while out on one of the trips with fur to St. Paul, I met Jim Hill, who at that time had a saw mill. We were without salt while trapping, and were obliged to eat so much fresh meat that I was sick for some time.

REBELS CAPTURED ME

It was not to be expected that a young fellow of my stamp could stay out of a fray like the historic rebellion of 1867, and as a result of my activity on the side of the government, I soon found myself a prisoner of war. They kept me locked up in a miserable kind of place for several months and fed me on hard tack and water. Then General Woolsley came along, and got me out somehow, and hired me for his scout. He fitted me up with a new rig and horse and I felt as proud as the King of England. I went all through the war and scouted over the country for six months or

more. Then when it was all done, I worked for three years on General Strange's ranch, mostly at scouting, for the Indians were around.

MAIL CARRIER FROM CALGARY

After this I came farther west and for six years carried the mails between Calgary and the Crow's Nest for the Hudson's Bay Company, making weekly trips on horseback. In those days I was as near to the regulation cowboy type as could well be, and on my lonely rides across country I many times had occasion to use my revolver and lasso. Incidentally, I mixed in a little buffalo hunting with my mail carrying. This was a generally peaceful kind of life, however, and I was not altogether sorry when I heard that the Riel Rebellion had broken out and war had started again. That was in 1885, and at once I went back to Winnipeg and signed up with General Strange as a scout. I spent seven months at seven dollars a day, my work being to watch out for Indians. They watched for me too and one day they nearly put an end to me. I was out on a buffalo hunt near Lake Winnipeg with six companions and while temporarily separated

from the others, I was captured by the Reds, who in fiendish revenge tied me to a tree and prepared to punish me at the cost of my life.

MY CLOSEST CALL

They didn't like the white men in the country at all and along with all the rest they were always put out by our trying to hunt their buffalo. We, of course, were trying to get some meat for the company and for the soldiers stationed at the fort. When they caught me and tied me up, I thought my time had come for sure. They left me for a time, after making me fast and fell to gathering sticks and brush and piling them around me. I knew what that meant; they were going to make a fire and burn me to death. That was about the closest call I ever had. But just as they were ready to light the fire the other six men in my party came up and drove them away. I then broke loose and drifted with the soldiers and ammunition, to prevent the Indians from taking me. I was necessary to send a message to the General on the other side of the river. General Strange meeting with a refusal from the other soldiers, asked me to

take the letter to General Middleton, who was on the left wing of the river. I told him I would make the attempt, but was not sure of getting back safely. I went as far as the river bank and saw that the Indians were on the other side getting closer to me all the time. I left my horse and dropped into the river, where I was compelled to remain for several hours, with my head out only far enough to breathe. In the meantime the Indians danced the Pow-Wow (war dance), then took my horse and rode away. After they had gone I managed to go to General Middleton with the letter. The fight started the following morning, after which I returned to General Strange, who thought that the Indians must have captured me. I was in the battles of Battleford, Batoche, and Fort Pitt, and had many narrow escapes.

For a few years I served with "Lord Smith" (the late Lord Strathcona) and besides acting as scout, did chores for him in the useful capacity of handy man. After the Riel Rebellion I was given my discharge from military service and since that time I have been my own master. Several years were spent in hunting and trapping and in that work I have gone up and

down the length and breadth of Alberta and Saskatchewan. I became an expert in fur hunting, and from first to last made a good deal of money, combining a little gold mining now and then with trapping. My money did not last long, and today I am entirely dependent upon what I earn as janitor and the sale of my book.

Mixed in with my years of roving adventure in the west were some incidents of a special character, such as my move across the line between the two wars to Wisconsin, where I married. My wife and two children died and left me alone in the world. Another departure was starting up a livery business in Seattle, for I had long been an expert horseman, and without a superior in handling a team. But the barn at Seattle burned down, and all the capital I had was gone. There was nothing to do but to come back to Alberta and try hunting once more. About twenty years ago I came to the Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan districts. I enlisted at Edmonton for service in the Sitting Bull uprising, in which again I acted for a short time as scout. This was my last military service

MY TRIP WEST TO THE KLONDYKE

At one time while I was freighting with dog teams as far north as White Horse I noticed another team ahead of me. They were traveling slowly uphill and down hill, although quite a distance from me, I asked my partner if he saw them. He said yes, and also said that he thought they must be heavily loaded as they were going very slow. It being cold and not being able to see ahead to any considerable distance, our dogs' feet becoming quite sore and raw from traveling, and our slow traveling, my partner thought it better to stop and build a fire and put shoes on our dogs before getting too bad, but the shoes being among the rest of the stuff we did not wish to unpack until we reached the team ahead, and I persuaded my partner to keep on going. He did not like this as he owned half share in the dogs and was worried about their feet. However, we kept on going and near evening we caught up to the other team ahead of us. They were nearly played out and their dogs in a like condition, our dogs not much better. The men of the other team were trying to build a fire but were unable to do so, being numb with cold and almost frozen. One of the men had

frozen one of his hands until it had turned black, both men crying like children. I told my partner to rub the man's hand in the snow as quickly as possible while I was building a fire. In this way we saved their lives. I found many on that trip lying on the road frozen to death. About ten years ago while driving a stage and under the influence of liquor, I had the misfortune to break my shoulder in a runaway accident. I was sent to one of the Edmonton hospitals for treatment. From this place I was ejected for bringing in whiskey. The drinking and smoking habit had got a great hold on me by this time, so that it seemed I could not live without indulging in them. So sick and penniless and friendless, I found myself wandering the streets one night. An empty box car at the C.N.R. station seemed the only available refuge. Here I spent the night. Crawling out next morning hungry and desolate, a kind hearted policeman said, "You better go to the Beulah Mission. They help folks there." Painfully I made my way to the buildings pointed out to me. Here I found a kindly welcome and the help I so sorely needed. I was impressed with the atmosphere of the place and felt that the constant kindness shown to

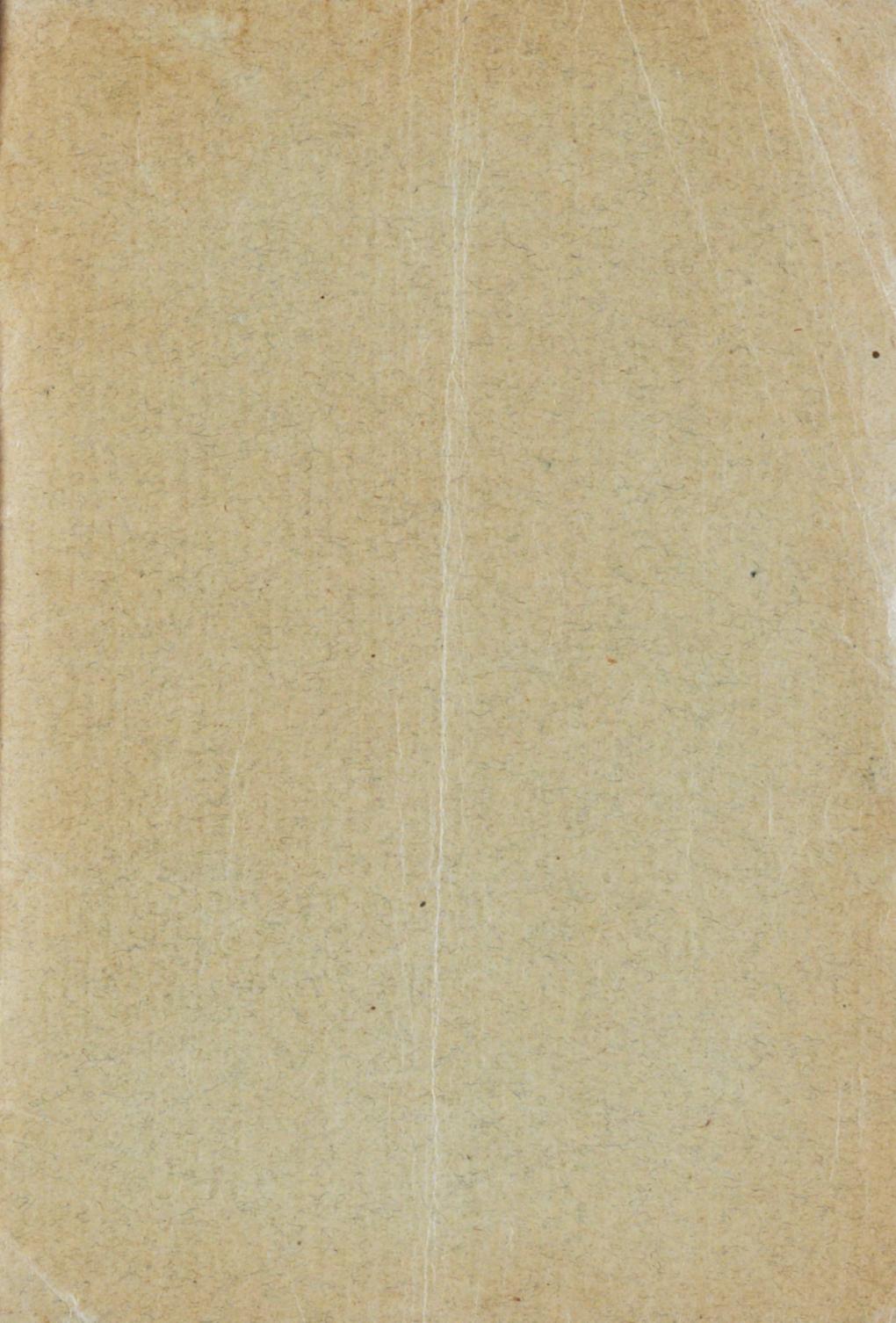
the many outcasts and down-and-outs gathered there must have for its source the spirit of the compassionate Christ, who came to seek and save that which was lost, and someway I was not there long until I felt I was all wrong. That I had been spending my life without God. But I did not yield at once to the strivings of the Holy Spirit. The craving for strong drink was on me all the time and once becoming violent in one of my outbreaks, they locked me in the drunk room, from which I made a sensational escape through the window. But I knew they were my best friends and came back again. This time I felt I must have help outside of myself, and coming humbly to the Saviour I cried, "Here, Lord, I yield myself to thee, 'Tis all that I can do," and I did not come in vain. I may seem strange to some, but there came to me a consciousness of sins forgiven and that terrible craving for strong drink that had mastered me for many years was gone. In its place there was a peace and joy I had never known before. I knew God was with me and was my friend. Of course, living the life I had, my ideas of what a Christian ought to be were somewhat hazy. One day I met the Superintendent as she came around the corner of the building, and said,

“Here is two dollars, Miss Chatham. I was up at the races and bet on the blaek horse and won two dollars.” Of course the good lady was properly shocked and told me that betting and gambling belonged to the old life, and I haven’t bet on any horse, black or white, since. God has taken care of me so that I have lacked no good thing, and the future looks bright for I know I am headed for the place “where many mansions be,” and one of them is mine.”

“And I shall see Him
Face to face,
And till the story
Saved by grace.”









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